



# Holiday reading

some suggestions for the summer holidays

SABRINA GOSLING

## Book Selector

It's that time of year again, when people have more time for leisure reading and holiday reading lists have to be compiled. I know when I'm put on the spot and asked to recommend some good books my mind often goes completely blank. I'm sure it happens to some public librarians too. So here, in no particular order, are some ideas. I asked around for recommendations from other people too, so I haven't read all of the books listed here myself. I've tried to provide a good mix of authors, titles and genres. Some are light 'beach reads', others require a bit more effort on the reader's part. I hope you find something to suit you.

Meyer, Deon. **Seven days**.- Hodder; 2012.

When considering holiday reading, an author that immediately springs to mind is our very own Deon Meyer and his series of crime thrillers. The good news for all the fans out there who don't read his books in the original Afrikaans is that his latest is now out in English (once again ably translated by KL Seegers). As in **Thirteen hours**, the very interesting, and likeable, Benny Griessel takes centre stage once again, although he does share it with Captain Mbali Kaleni (a character I hope to see more of in future books).

This is another race-against-time police procedural. An e-mail is sent to the police: 'I'll shoot a policeman every day until you arrest the murderer of Hanneke Sloet.' The Sloet case is re-opened and Benny has just seven days to solve the murder, while Mbali works on finding the shooter. As one expects, this is a real page-turner.

This is one of the most enjoyable crime series around and, I think, the best in South Africa. If you haven't read any Deon Meyer titles yet, you have a real treat in store. If you have the time, I would suggest you start with his early books - you won't be sorry. Definitely read **Thirteen hours** before **7 days**. In the former there are two murders to solve and a desperate race to save a missing American backpacker. 'Meyer is a class act, his novel edgy, subtly plotted and beautifully balanced between fast-paced action, believable characterisation, the tense process of investigation and penetrating social comment.' That was from a review of **Thirteen hours** in *The*

*Australian*, but it could be said of any of his books. Meyer has won prizes for his books both in the original and in translation. They are really riveting and make ideal holiday reading but, be warned, it's best to choose a time when you don't have to be too sociable, because once you've started one of his thrillers you won't want to put it down.

Beukes, Lauren. **Zoo City**.- Jacana, 2010.

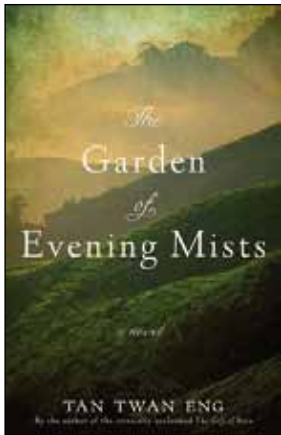


Staying with South African authors, but moving on to something very different is Lauren Beukes's second novel, **Zoo City**. It's not for everyone but you don't have to be a science fiction or urban fantasy reader to enjoy this gritty, inventive novel set in a near-future, alternate Hillbrow, where 'perpetrators of terrible crimes acquire strange powers and magical animal companions'. Her main character, Zinzi, is a wonderful creation. Zinzi's animal companion is a sloth,

which gave her the special power, or shavi, to find lost things. The book was short-listed for a number of awards and won the prestigious Arthur C Clarke Award (2011).

One of the judges said: '**Zoo City** filters brutal social honesty through a stunning imagination to produce a world recognisably ours and obviously different. The plotting is tight, the characterisation strong and the writing superb. We had a fantastic shortlist but for me this was the clear winner.' Artist Joey Hi-Fi won both the best artwork prize of the 2010 British SF Association Awards and the Grand Prix de l'Imaginaire for the cover. In his review in the *Cape Times*, local author and poet Ken Barris wrote: 'For those who enjoy urban fantasy, local craziness, cyberpunk satire, offbeat crime fiction or simply a delicious read, you won't do much better than **Zoo City**.' Even if you're doubtful, do at least give it a try. It's a really entertaining read.

Tan, Twang Eng. **The garden of evening mists.**- Myrmidon, 2012.

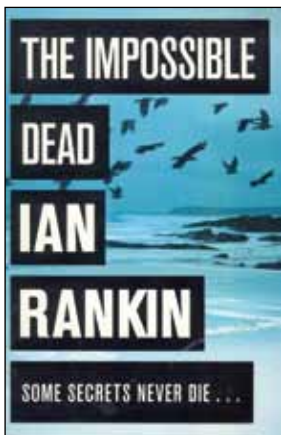


Moving away from South African authors to a Malaysian author, but one with strong South African connections, I'm recommending Tan's Booker short-listed second novel, **The garden of evening mists**. I haven't read it yet but I've got it on good authority that it's a wonderful book and I'm definitely putting it at the top of my 'to read' list this summer. It's set in Malaya in 1949 and follows Yun Ling Teoh, a lawyer who has survived a Japanese war-time labour camp. **The Garden** is exquisite, impressively beautiful and

yet a tightly controlled story evoking the history of... Malaysia and its painful past with Japan... It is, indeed, deliciously close to perfect' (*Sunday Argus*).

Rankin, Ian. **The Complaints.**- Orion, 2009.

**The impossible dead.**- Orion, 2011.



For those who, like me, are great Rebus fans and felt rather bereft when he retired, Malcolm Fox is a worthy successor. There've been two books so far, and I've loved both of them. The setting is still Edinburgh but Fox is a very different kind of policeman from the much-loved Rebus; he works in the unpopular Complaints and Conduct Department, 'the cops who investigate other cops'. In the first book, Fox is set the task of building a relationship with a police officer suspected of being part of a paedophile ring, while in the

second, he and his team travel to Fife to investigate possible police corruption and cover-ups. This is another extremely good Scottish crime series.

Worth mentioning here, are Stuart MacBride and Denise Mina. If you are looking for more Scottish crime, I can recommend both authors. I'm always thrilled when a new title from either of them comes my way.

Kingsolver, Barbara. **The lacuna: a novel.**- Faber, 2009.

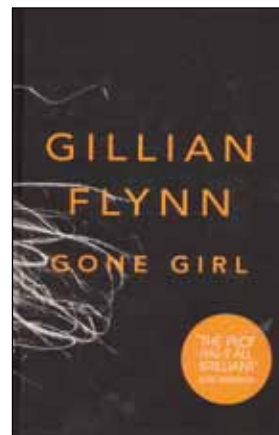
Quite a daunting, but ultimately satisfying read is Kingsolver's Orange Prize-winning novel about art and politics. **The lacuna** is a long book with a wide sweep, moving from 1930s Mexico to 1950s America, and mixing fictional characters with real historical figures like Mexican artists, Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera, and Marxist theorist, Leon Trotsky. Her motivation for writing this was what she saw as the 'misplaced patriotism' that swept the US after 9/11. A reviewer wrote in *The Independent*: 'Every few years, you read a book

that makes everything else in life seem unimportant. **The lacuna** is the first book in a long time that made me swap my bike for public transport, just so I could keep reading.' But not everyone enjoyed this novel. My advice is to hang in there for the first 40 pages or so, because it does take a while to get into and it really is worth the effort. I'm a longtime Kingsolver fan, but if you've never read anything of hers I think your first should be **The poisonwood bible**, a wonderful, wonderful novel set in the Belgian Congo. I also loved her first novel, **The bean trees**, and its sequel, **Pigs in heaven**. While not without flaws, it was a surprisingly accomplished debut and even after some twenty years I still remember the young woman Taylor and Turtle, the little Cherokee girl who is foisted upon her. 'Hers is a story about love and friendship, abandonment and belonging, and the discovery of surprising resources in apparently empty places.'

Lupton, Rosamund. **Sister.**- Piatkus, 2010.

This debut novel from a scriptwriter is a very readable psychological thriller about two sisters – one recently dead, the other trying to make sense of her sister's death. Beatrice doesn't really believe that Tess committed suicide. Lupton's portrayal of the love between two very different sisters, combined with a tense, twisty crime mystery make **Sister** a real page-turner.

Flynn, Gillian. **Gone girl.**- Weidenfeld, 2012.



For those whose thing is psychological suspense, **Gone girl** is a must-read. It's both a mystery of a disappearance and a dissection of a marriage gone horribly wrong. The novel opens on Nick and Amy Dunne's fifth wedding anniversary, the day she disappears. There are signs of a struggle in the house, and Nick becomes the prime suspect in what the police (and the media) believe is murder. The story is told in alternating chapters by Nick and Amy – Nick about the time after his wife's disappearance and Amy,

through entries in her diary, about the time before she disappeared.

The reader is never sure which narrator can be relied upon and is kept guessing the whole time as the plot twists and turns. The author said this about her work: 'In those first two novels (**Sharp objects** and **Dark places**) I explored the geography of loneliness – and the devastation it can lead to. With **Gone girl**, I wanted to go [in] the opposite direction: what happens when two people intertwine their lives completely. I wanted to explore the geography of intimacy – and the devastation it can lead to. Marriage gone toxic.' Well, she's certainly succeeded in doing that. In *Time* the novel was described as 'a portrait of a marriage so hilariously terrifying, it will make you have a good hard think about who the person on the other side of the bed really is'.

**Gone girl** won the Judges' Choice Award of the 2012 Boeke Prize.

Joyce, Rachel. **The unlikely pilgrimage of Harold Fry.**- Doubleday, 2012.

The Readers' Choice Award went to this debut novel, 'a low-key but affecting tale of a pensioner who has never confronted what has happened in his life, until he sets off suddenly one day to walk from Devon to Berwick-upon-Tweed, where a friend is dying'. Our reviewer thought it 'a beautiful story of redemption and transformation'.

Moyes, Jojo. **The horse dancer.**- Hodder, 2009.  
**Me before you.**- Joseph, 2012.

Moyes is an author whose books I feel very safe recommending (and I seem to have been recommending them for years) for she's a wonderful storyteller. I've enjoyed all of her books that I've read and think they make ideal holiday reading. I've selected just two.

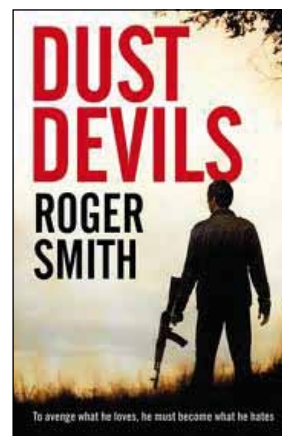
**The horse dancer** is a lovely, engrossing novel about performing horses, dressage, the relationship between a girl, her grandfather and a horse, and the people who get to know them. 'Moyes weaves a strikingly original tale which captivates from the first page ... There are all sorts of unusual touches in this magical novel: the descriptions of hidden equestrian life in the heart of London, of illegal early-morning horse races along flyovers, of the rarefied world of dressage, of the intense relationship between rider and horse. Most poignantly, Moyes evokes the terror of children lost in an impenetrable official system they can't understand. She creates a cast of very believable and sympathetic characters and maintains the tension throughout' (*Daily Express*).

In her most recent novel, **Me before you**, an unskilled, young working-class woman, desperate for work, takes a job as carer/companion to a quadriplegic man. It's another absorbing and moving novel. I've thought for some time now that perhaps Moyes is not as well-known as she ought to be, and so was very pleased to see this book being picked up by the very popular Richard & Judy Bookclub. Richard said: 'One of the reasons I so enjoyed this novel is that it tackles a very modern dilemma. If a disabled young man feels his life is over; then no matter how much those around him – his parents, his friends – love him and want to help, is he justified in deciding his own fate, even if that means those left behind will be desolated? ... It's a very powerful and emotional novel, full of insight into people's lives. We think it is a perfect read – uplifting, but also tragic. Precisely the elements the best romantic stories are made of.'

Smith, Roger. **Dust devils.**- Serpent's Tail, 2011.

Local screenwriter/novelist Smith's third novel is a pacy action thriller set mainly in rural KwaZulu-Natal. It's 'an ordinary-man-in-peril' story, but it's also much more than that. Crime, political corruption, extreme poverty, myths about AIDS, taxi wars – they're all here. Out-of-work journalist, Robert Dell, is on the run after being framed for his family's murder. The person responsible is Inja Mazibuko, a brutal man and staunch supporter of a powerful political figure. He's the 'dog' who's sent out to do his boss's dirty work – the murder, the maiming, the intimidation of opponents. The third protagonist is Zondi, an investigator who apparently also

appeared in Smith's debut novel, **Mixed blood**. He's an interesting character, flawed but sympathetic. I really hope he will feature in a future novel. **Dust devils** is a gritty South African thriller; it's scary and violent and nothing in it is simple or straightforward. Here the story begins in Clifton, but his earlier books are set on the Cape Flats. His latest, **Capture**, is set in a more luxurious part of Cape Town and begins outside a beach house. Nick sits on the shore smoking a joint, unaware that his four-year-old daughter is drowning. Security guard Vernon IS aware, but he just watches, and only intervenes when he knows it will be too late. A relationship develops between Vernon and the guilty, grief-stricken father, but it takes a while before Nick realises that Vernon is anything but a friend. Smith's thrillers are definitely worth reading, but perhaps not for the faint-hearted or the squeamish.



Smith, Ali. **There but for the.**- H. Hamilton, 2011.

Here we have a book by another Smith, but it's a vastly different kind of novel. I haven't read it yet but it was selected by a number of people as their best book of 2011. One of them was writer AS Byatt who said of it: '**There but for the** is a brilliant title for a brilliant novel ... The story is about a man who leaves a tedious dinner party, locks himself into a bedroom and refuses to leave. His hostess calls in the press and he becomes a cause celebre. He is put together in a series of stories from different, tangential points of view. The novel is both funny and moving – it succeeds because of Smith's extraordinary skill with ordinary language.'

Egan, Jennifer. **A visit from the Goon Squad.**- Corsair, 2011.

Like the previous novel, this was chosen by many people as their favourite book of the year and, also like the previous novel, it is 'a collection of interlocking stories organised around a single theme and featuring multiple characters'. It's an entertaining read about music, the music business and modern technology. 'Following her diabolically clever **The Keep**, Egan tracks the members of a San Francisco punk band and their hangers-on over the decades as they wander out into the wider, bewildering world' (*Booklist*). This book received a number of awards including a Pulitzer, but a few readers thought it over-written and overrated. The initial couple of chapters are a bit weaker, but this is well-worth reading. After all, you may be one of the many who really love this book.

Ford, Richard. **Canada.**- Bloomsbury, 2012.

A book which I think will be in the running for quite a few literary prizes, including a Pulitzer, is Richard Ford's highly-anticipated new novel, **Canada**. It's a thoughtful, slow-moving (or 'unhurried', as one reviewer put it) coming-of-age novel in which the reader knows right from the start what is going to happen. '*First I'll tell about*

the robbery our parents committed. Then about the murders, which happened later.' 15-year-old Dell's life changes completely when his parents go to gaol. He narrates the story, looking back and trying to make sense of it all. 'There is a sure-footed, plain-spoken quality to Ford's language that is pitch perfect for the tale being told, as well as for creating the atmosphere of the landscape, both physical and emotional, with which Dell must come to terms' (*Globe and Mail*). 'Canada is a superlatively good book, richly imagined and beautifully fashioned' (*Guardian*).

Seidel, Kathleen Gilles. **Keep your mouth shut and wear beige.**- Pan, 2009.

For those who want something much, much lighter; this is an entertaining novel about the trials and tribulations of being the mother of the groom.

Bauer, Belinda. **Blacklands.**- Bantam, 2010.

**Darkside.**- Bantam, 2011.

**Finders keepers.**- Bantam, 2012.



Bauer's excellent psychological crime dramas are set in the fictional village of Shipcott on the edge of Exmoor. They are a trilogy of linked novels which should be read in sequence because Bauer focuses on the characters, their relationships and experiences as much as on the crimes themselves. **Blacklands** 'caused the hearts of hardened reviewers to flip a beat. Was that extraordinary insight into a battle of wits between a murderer and a young boy just a one-off sensation, or

was this newcomer to the crime lists capable of another book on the same level? Happily for the genre, **Darkside** shows she can do



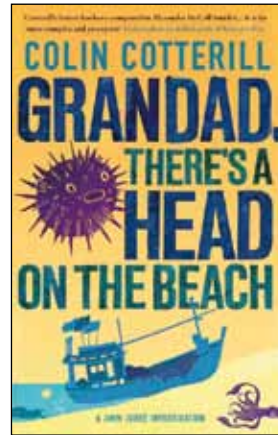
it again. Bauer takes the same setting ... with the same people, but shifts the focus so that the boy who was the principal character in the previous book plays a minor part and the narrative is seen mainly through the eyes of the local policeman, Jonas Holly, and his wife Lucy, who suffers from MS. ... Tension mounts with extraordinary narrative twists. Bauer takes astonishing risks but arcs down to a perfect landing (*The Independent*). In **Finders keepers**, children 'are once again the prey; this time

of a kidnapper who leaves no ransom demands but only a terse note brutally accusing their parents of failing to love them ... It's a

story that grips the reader from the outset, but once the kidnapper's motives become known, Bauer racks up the tension for a terrific climax out on the moor' (*Sun Times Lifestyle*). These novels are disturbing and utterly compelling. Highly recommended.

Cotterill, Colin. **Killed at the whim of a hat.**- Quercus, 2012.

**Grandad, there's a head on the beach.**- Quercus, 2012.



The books in his enjoyable series about the elderly Laotian pathologist, Dr Siri Paibourne, have become bestsellers. With **Killed at the whim of a hat** Cotterill changed direction somewhat and created a new, much younger protagonist, Jimm Juree. She was a hot-shot city crime reporter now reluctantly living at the dilapidated holiday resort her mother bought in the southern part of Thailand. Very bored, 'she thinks her career is over. But soon she's investigating a murdered abbot and the discovery

of two dead hippies who've been buried for decades in their van' (*Publishers Weekly*). So far, there have been only two in the series but Juree has proved a very popular character and the stories are great fun. 'Cotterill combines plenty of humour with fascinating and unusual characters, a solid mystery, and the relatively unfamiliar setting of southern Thailand to launch what may be the best new international mystery series since the **No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency**' (*Booklist*).

Larsson, Asa. **The savage altar.**- Viking, 2007.

**The blood spilt.**- Viking, 2008.

**The black path.**- MacLehose P, 2012.



There is so much good crime fiction coming out of Scandinavia that it's hard to know what to recommend. So I've chosen a really good series that doesn't seem to very well known. It's written by a Swedish lawyer and the central character is Rebecka Martinsson, a Stockholm tax lawyer, who comes from remote Kiruna where she was part of a fundamentalist church. In **The savage altar** (also called **Sun storm**) she is asked to return to Kiruna by the sister of the brutally murdered church leader. It's a

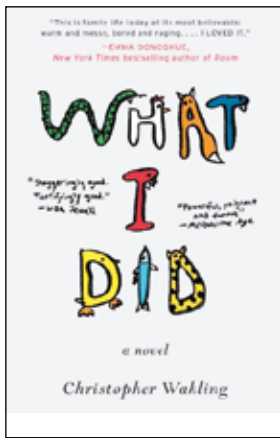
compelling read and won Sweden's Best First Crime Novel Award. The other books are just as good – this really is a wonderful series. One does need to read the books in order because a lot of the focus is on the characters rather than the police investigation, and in

particular on Martinsson. We have not yet seen the 4th book, **Untily thy wrath be past**.

Stedman, ML. **The light between oceans**.- Doubleday, 2012.

This debut novel, short-listed for this year's Boeke Prize, has been recommended to me by friends, family and colleagues. I don't know if I'm the only one left who hasn't read it yet, but it's definitely going on my 'to read' list. A young childless couple live on a remote island off the Australian coast, where he is the lighthouse keeper. When a boat is washed ashore with a dead man and a sleeping baby on board, their decision to pass the child off as their own has far-reaching and unforeseen consequences. 'Stedman draws the reader into her emotionally complex story right from the beginning, with lush descriptions of this savage and beautiful landscape, and vivid characters with whom we can readily empathize' (*Booklist*). It was described in the *Cape Times* as 'one of the most hauntingly tragic and heartbreakingly beautiful novels I have come across in a while ...'

Wakling, Christopher. **What I did**.- J. Murray, 2011.

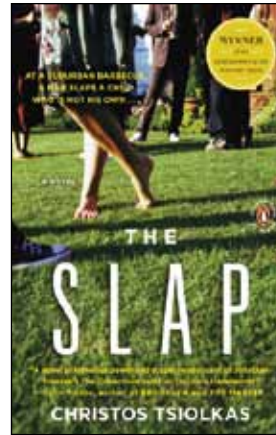


The author's description: 'Billy is six, and he tells the story. It begins when he runs away from his father and into a busy road. Billy's father ... smacks him, hard. When a passer-by objects, Billy's dad tells her to get lost. She does the opposite. She informs social services, who launch an investigation into the family, an investigation with which Billy's dad refuses to cooperate, and the implications of which Billy cannot understand. Between them they make matters infinitely worse ... So on one level

the book is about the boundary between the state and the family and the issue of whether or not it's ever justifiable to smack a child. But it's also about parental love – how far will we go to protect and hang on to those we love? And at its core, because of its narrative voice, the novel is about childhood, about being six: the extreme present-tenseness; the jump-cuts in focus; and the frequently hilarious misunderstandings children make. Although the subject matter is dark, Billy's voice leavens the novel, I hope.' Although I'm a fan of Wakling's books, I was reluctant to pick up this one because of the subject matter; I thought it would be dark and depressing. But it isn't and, once I'd started reading, I couldn't stop. I loved young Billy's narrative voice: it's unusual but authentic, the story is sad and sometimes even heartbreaking, but it's funny too. It's not a depressing book at all. I recommend this, and his earlier books too. In **On Cape Three Points** a young lawyer tries to cover up his loss of confidential papers. A group of backpackers trekking in the Himalayas are taken hostage by Kashmiri terrorists in **Beneath the diamond sky** and a father-daughter relationship is explored in **The**

**undertow**. All Wakling's books are compulsively readable. He really is an accomplished storyteller.

Tsiolkas, Christos. **The slap**.- Tuskar Rock P, 2010.



'A child getting spanked is the device this Australian author uses to explore a number of themes in **The slap**. The novel was both a commercial success and critically acclaimed, winning the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best Book in 2009. 'Through these characters' lives, we experience the full gamut of 21st-century suburban life. Our protagonists are young and old, of multi-cultural backgrounds, married and single, gay and straight. While the event's ricochet effects become apparent, they grapple with spousal

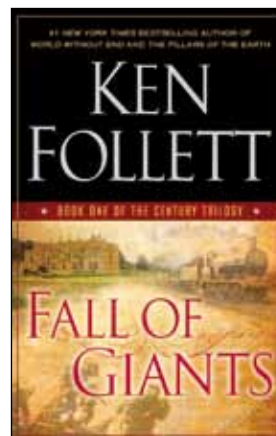
infidelities; cultural constraints and expectations; alcoholism; the biological clock; parenting; loyalties and conflicts of interest' (*Bookseller & Publisher*).

Koch, Herman. **The dinner**.- Atlantic, 2012.

This Dutch novel has been compared to **The slap** 'thanks to its exploration into what happens when the stable familiar conventions of middle-class families crumble. The plot focuses on two couples who meet for dinner in Amsterdam. So far, so normal – until it transpires that both twosomes are united by a horrific act jointly committed by their respective teenage sons' (*Vogue*). Our reviewer, who loved **The slap**, said this novel is definitely not like it. She found **The dinner** unputdownable, but was left with feelings of disquiet and discomfort at the end.

Follett, Ken. **Fall of giants**.- Pan, 2010.

**Winter of the world**.- Macmillan, 2012.



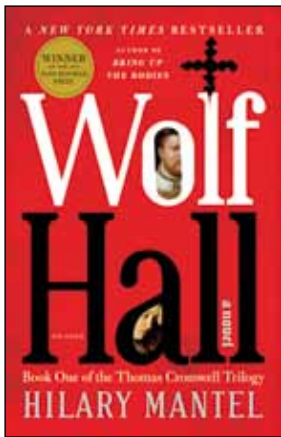
If well-written, thick historical novels are what you're looking for then I can recommend Follett's absorbing *Century* trilogy. Only the first two books have been published so far, but they should keep you going for a while. 'In the first volume we followed five families in five locales through the lead up to and the horrors of the First World War. I thought his rollout of the causes of the War was masterly and his involvement with the families and the various characters made for vivid reading. The second volume

is just as compelling. The same families with their children come to the fore and we follow them through the highlights and horrors of the Second World War. This is fast reading and will absorb you from

start to finish. Ken Follett has all the pacing and plotting of a thriller combined with historical accuracy and emotional commitment to his characters – all you have to do is follow him and you will love it' (Wordsworth reviewer).

Mantel, Hilary. **Wolf Hall**.- Fourth Estate, 2009.

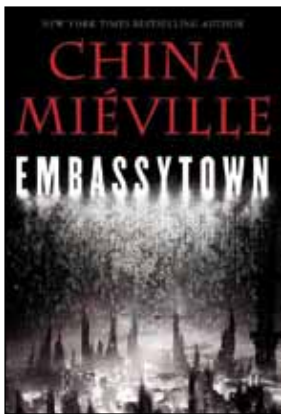
**Bring up the bodies**.- Fourth Estate, 2012.



People are raving about these historical novels. 'If you have never read Mantel's historical fiction before, then start here. It (**Wolf Hall**) is atmospheric, compelling and terrifying. Mantel is writing at the top of her game' (*Literary Review*). **Wolf Hall** was originally intended to be the first book in a two-part series set during the Tudor period – a recreation of the life of Thomas Cromwell and the court of Henry VIII. Soon after winning the 2009 Man Booker Prize the author decided that,

since she had so much material, she would rather write a trilogy. The sequel, **Bring up the bodies**, has just won the 2012 Man Booker. (South African author JM Coetzee is one of the few other authors to have won the Booker twice.) 'Mantel has succeeded in doing what only the most gifted novelist can do. She has fleshed out an enigma ... and made us accept her interpretation as valid ... It is Mantel's crowning achievement to make Cromwell not just powerful but sympathetic. Mantel is a consummate setter of scenes: descriptions of stunning poetry are embedded amid savagery and earthiness. The historical novel does not come any better than this. It will be as much of a success as its predecessor' (*Library Journal*). Besides being critically acclaimed and winning numerous awards **Wolf Hall** was also very popular. Some people have found the sequel difficult to get into, but others have loved it just as much, or even more. The final book in the trilogy, **The mirror and the light**, is due in 2015.

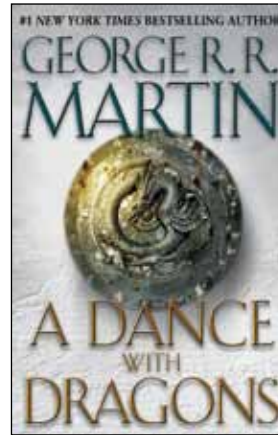
Mieville, China. **Embassytown**.- Macmillan, 2011.



I've hardly mentioned any science fiction or fantasy in this list, which is a bit strange as I read a lot of both. So I'll just briefly mention a couple of authors here. If you are looking for a new author and have not yet discovered China Miéville, why not read him this holiday. I strongly recommend his novels, particularly **Embassytown**. I can't do justice to his books here as they are layered and complex - all

I can say is that they're brilliant. His novel, **The city & the city** won masses of awards but is much more of a 'love or hate' kind of book. He's a really exciting writer and his books are cleverly constructed and completely absorbing. Miéville is one of the most inventive and imaginative voices in speculative fiction today; he certainly deserves all the many awards he's received.

Martin, George RR. **A dance with dragons**.- HarperVoyager, 2011.



Published last year, **A dance with dragons** was the long-awaited and much-anticipated fifth book in Martin's engrossing fantasy series, *A song of fire and ice*. It didn't disappoint. Some of you will have watched the excellent television adaptation of the first book, **A game of thrones**. Whether or not you did see it, I still urge you to read the books. This is a most enjoyable series that will keep you entertained for a long time.

Watson, SJ. **Before I go to sleep**.- Black Swan, 2011.



Memory loss is the theme of this psychological thriller. 'The story is told by Christine, married to Ben and suffering from a type of amnesia that means her memories are wiped away every time she goes to sleep. She wakes in bed, a middle-aged man beside her, flees from what she thinks is a one-night stand only to be told this man is her husband, that she is not in her 20s but is in fact 47. 'In my life there is a then, a before, though before what I cannot say, and there is a now, and there is nothing

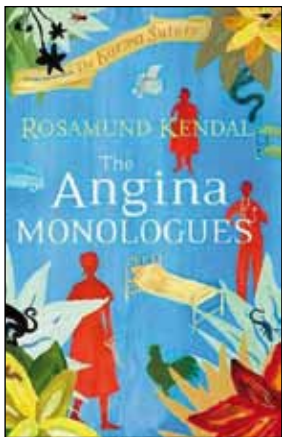
between the two but a long, silent emptiness that has led me here, to me and him, in this house.' Ben leaves for work. Christine discovers a journal she has been keeping: 'Don't trust Ben' is emblazoned on the first page. Already optioned for film by Ridley Scott, **Before I go to sleep** is a nerve-jangling journey down the rabbit hole of Christine's mind, towards the deadly secrets waiting at the bottom' (*Observer*). It's a first novel and the author, a doctor, wrote it in between shifts at St Thomas's Hospital in London.

Verghese, Abraham. **Cutting for Stone: a novel**.- Chatto, 2009.

This is another debut novel written by a doctor. 'Lauded for his sensitive memoir (**My own country**) about his time as a doctor in

eastern Tennessee at the onset of the AIDS epidemic in the '80s, Verghese turns his formidable talents to fiction, mining his own life and experiences in a magnificent, sweeping novel that moves from India to Ethiopia to an inner-city hospital in New York City over decades and generations. ... Verghese's weaving of the practice of medicine into the narrative is fascinating even as the story bobs and weaves with the power and coincidences of the best 19th-century novel' (*Publishers Weekly*).

Kendal, Rosamund. **The angina monologues**.- Jacana, 2010,



Kendal is also a doctor, but a local one, and this is her second novel. It's a real slice of South African life; I was completely engrossed and missed the characters when I'd finished the book. It's funny and sad, and sometimes shocking – definitely worth reading. I hope this gets a wide readership, not just here but overseas too. It is 'set in a dysfunctional rural KwaZulu-Natal hospital ... [and] takes us through a year in the lives of three women medics starting

their compulsory internship. It is written with wit and compassion and, although utterly realistic in its depiction of the venality of those who work the system, it still avoids destructive cynicism. The narrative is centred on Capetonian kugel Rachel, her Durban equivalent Seema, and from Aliwal North, Nomsa, desperate to avoid looking like a charity case from the Eastern Cape. Which, of course, Nomsa is, despite her Levi's jeans and her metallic grey Beemer. She also has a family and ancestors that she can't leave behind, try as she might. But then family is an edgy issue for all three ... Each will discover unexpected strengths during their year ... The Tugela Bridge community will present issues not commonly dealt with at a big city tertiary academic hospital ... there's a gross-out factor of note ... Don't make the mistake of dismissing **The Angina monologues** as chick-lit. Its issues affect us all, and although the novel is far from didactic or moralising in its tone, it leaves the reader thinking. Highly recommended' ([www.tonight.co.za](http://www.tonight.co.za)). Her debut novel, **Karma suture**, is worth reading too.

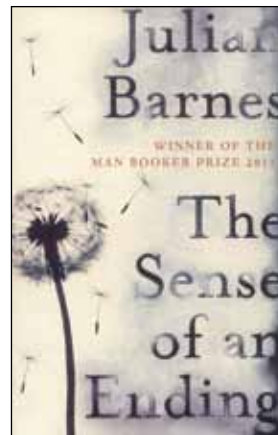
Edugyan, Esi. **Half blood blues**.- Serpent's Tail, 2012.

The author visited Cape Town recently for the Open Book Festival. Her novel, **Half blood blues**, has been widely praised, winning prizes and being short-listed for many others, including both the Orange and the 2011 Man Booker. 'Canadian Edugyan's second novel jumps between Berlin and Paris in 1939-40 and Berlin in 1992 to tell the story of a German American jazz band and its star trumpeter, Hieronymous Falk. Having hit it big during the Weimar era, the band, a mixture of expat African Americans and German jazz fanatics ... now faces tough and increasingly dangerous times

in the wake of Hitler's ban against degenerate music ... Edugyan tells this incredibly rich story of music, politics, and personal betrayal both subtly and dramatically, unveiling the mystery of what happened to Falk as she exposes the tensions between the band members and the secret that has been gnawing at one of them for half a century ... [the] novel mixes palpable period atmosphere with an interpersonal drama of great emotional depth. That narrow moment in time when the freewheeling decadence of Weimar Germany gave way to jackbooted tyranny has been the subject of much fine fiction, but Edugyan is the first to overlay it with jazz history. It makes a sublime marriage' (*Booklist*). The *New York Review of Books* described it in their Editor's Choice column as 'an electric, heart-breaking story about music, race, love and loyalty, and the sacrifices we ask of ourselves, and demand of others, in the name of art'.



Barnes, Julian. **The sense of an ending**.- Cape, 2011.



In 2011, after having been short-listed three times previously, Barnes finally won the Man Booker Prize for this short novel about a middle-aged man looking back at his student days. It's about life and relationships but mainly it's about memory and how we remember our own past. It's beautifully written and, being so short, a quick read. It's also quite an easy read – which is not something one can often say about Booker winners. I think it's a novel many people, writers especially, chose as

one of their best books of 2011.

I can't think of a more appropriate novel to complete my list of books to read over the holidays than one with the title **The sense of an ending**.



CL